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ABSTRACT

Despite the proliferation in the last decade of school-college collaboratives designed to help disadvantaged students, a number of unsolved problems about their operation have limited their effectiveness. Schools and colleges collaborate to solve mutual problems in the areas of student development, school improvement, and college improvement. Some of the most common collaborative activities include the following: (1) college-level study in high school; (2) academic counseling; (3) tutoring, mentoring, and skills building; (4) campus tours and contact with college students; (5) summer remedial or college programs; (6) parent involvement programs; (7) teacher development; and (8) curriculum improvement. Current collaboratives stress collegiality and equality in the relationships between the participating schools and colleges. Issues to be considered in the collaboration process include the following: (1) leadership; (2) hands-on participation by partners; (3) funding; and (4) respect for the natural stages of development. Networks of collaboratives can share lessons, give mutual support, and develop models. Among other considerations, the general perception is that school personnel, rather than the disadvantaged students who were the intended beneficiaries, benefit most from collaboration. A list of six references is appended. (FMW)

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School-College Alliances: Benefits for Low-Income Minorities

ERIC/CUE DIGEST NO. 53

by Carol Ascher & Wendy Schwartz

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
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SCHOOL-COLLEGE ALLIANCES: BENEFITS FOR LOW-INCOME MINORITIES

Introduction

The transition from high school to college is difficult for all students, but college enrollment may be simply beyond the grasp of some disadvantaged minority students. To help such students take advantage of the opportunities available to middle-class students, high schools and colleges have begun to collaborate. The collaborating institutions also benefit: public schools receive resources and support they could not otherwise afford, and colleges can be assured of a larger and more fully prepared freshman class.

Although school-college articulation efforts, such as advanced placement and dual enrollment programs, are not new, there has been a proliferation of school-college collaboratives since 1980. Morever, in contrast to the earlier efforts, which served relatively few minorities, current collaboratives often have minorities as their focus.

Why Schools and Colleges Collaborate

In general, schools and colleges recognize that they are dealing with related parts of a common problem: helping disadvantaged students get the education they need to join an increasingly sophisticated labor force. While neither their specific goals nor their methods of functioning are likely to be in complete accord, both partners believe that collaboration can help them solve problems of mutual concern.

Student Development. A primary reason for collaboration is to improve the college preparatory education of disadvantaged students through curriculum enhancement and remedial programs; and to provide students with counseling and other supports to promote high school completion, college enrollment and continued attendance until college graduation.

School Improvement. The infusion of college resources: (1) helps high schools develop new curricula to meet a reform agenda; (2) improves their facility, by providing laboratories and other equipment (or at least makes such resources available to students through campus access agreements); (3) helps develop programs for at-risk students (i.e., dropout prevention) that schools aren't able to implement independently; and (4) increases articulation between K-12 and post-secondary education. In addition, schools acquire prestige from collaborating with colleges, and this can help stem urban white middle class flight. Equally important, college ties can facilitate teacher recruitment and development (Gross, 1988). Finally, a number of school-college alliances offer schools the opportunity to participate in the research projects of schools of education. These collaboratives ensure that teaching is research-driven and that research is relevant to teachers' needs.

College Improvement. By helping to prepare students for college before they enroll, colleges can help ensure larger, more ethnically and racially diverse incoming classes, who are academically ready for college work. Thus, recruitment is easier, and the need for remedial courses diminished. Colleges also receive public relations benefits from collaborating: political and community leaders frequently urge colleges to focus more directly on the needs of urban students. Moreover, a common incentive is the increasing number of grants which stipulate school-college collaboration (Trubowitz, 1984).

Schools of education in particular can benefit from collaboratives. Public schools are a ready source of enrichment for teacher education curriculum, and of classes for student teachers and individual students for tutoring projects; and they are the best place to test research. Public schools can also offer schools of education more direct contributions, such as collaboration on the development of projects.

Types of Collaborative Activities

The number of activities already created by school-college collaboratives is enormous, and is steadily growing. Although early intervention may be more beneficial for students, most collaborative activities are for junior and senior high school students. In general, these activities fall into two categories: those that directly target students, and those that indirectly improve students' educational experiences. These are some of the most common collaborative activities:

College-Level Study in High School, often situated on college campuses, for the disadvantaged gifted.
Academic Counseling on precollege courses.
Tutoring, Mentoring, and Skills Building, provided by college faculty, staff, or students.
Campus Tours and Contact with College Students.
Summer Remedial or College Programs, on campus.
Parent Involvement Programs to encourage support for students' college aspirations at home.
Teacher Development to prepare teachers to teach new subjects or to improve their abilities in those previously studied, to raise their morale, and to heighten their expectations for disadvantaged students.
Curriculum Improvement, through creation of a community of practice-sensitive researchers and research-sensitive teachers.

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The Process of Collaboration

In the past, a hierarchal structure, with colleges holding the power and resources, was assumed to be one of the sources of friction in a collaborative and a cause of its eventual demise. Thus, current collaboratives strive for collegiality and equality in relationships between public school and college participants, although the ideal is usually beyond reach.

Leadership. Top leadership in both institutions should be involved to give legitimacy to the collaborative and to ensure the availability of human and financial resources (Mocker, Martin, & Brown, 1988).

Hands-On Participants. Participants should include individuals (i.e., principals, deans, teachers, professors, counselors) who have the most to gain from collaboration, and who represent a broad range of departments from both sides. Representatives from the school side are likely to be more eager to participate, since the reward system for college faculty still stresses teaching and publishing, and working with a collaborative can detract from those activities. Still, benefits can accrue to college participants, and they should be clearly indicated at the outset.

Funding. Broad-based and long-term funding is crucial to the stability of a collaborative, although it is difficult to secure. While foundations are currently supporting collaboratives in the short-run, as a means of improving the general health of urban areas, funders may steer collaboratives in a direction different from the one desired by their members. Further, the fact that colleges usually receive and administer the grants skews the power balance of the collaborative, despite efforts at equality.

Stages. Collaboratives move through various stages of development (Trubowitz, 1984; Gifford & Gabelko, 1987). For example, replacing feelings of distrust - one of the stages - with collegiality requires sharing experiences and roles. Other stages must be worked through similarly until mutuality and trust are achieved.

Networks of Collaboratives

Collaborative networks can share lessons, give mutual support, and develop models. There are currently several effective ones in operation, including The College Board's Educational EQuality Project Models Program, the Council of Chief State School Officers School/College Collaboration Project, the National Association of State University and Land-Grant College's University/Urban School Collaborative Program, and John Goodlad's National Network for Urban Renewal.

Conclusion

Despite the proliferation of collaboratives in the last decade, there are unsolved problems about the operation of collaboratives. Prime among them is control: the tendency is for colleges to dominate despite claims of equality. Also, questions remain about whether the resources needed for effective collaboration might be more effectively applied to other activities; while there has been much public and foundation enthusiasm for the growing prevalence of collaboratives, it is still questionable whether the large amounts of time and effort required to initiative and perpetuate them could be spent more productively on other methods of educational improvement for poor and minority students.

Further, notwithstanding the domination of colleges, the general perception is that school personnel benefit most from the collaboration—indeed, even more than the disadvantaged students who were the intended principal beneficiaries of collaborative projects (Mickelson, Kritek, Hedlund, & Kaufmann, 1988).

There are also some areas of concern to disadvantaged students, such as the financing of their college education, that thus far have remained largely untouched by collaboratives. These problems must be addressed if all students are to have equal access to a college education.

—Carol Ascher & Wendy Schwartz

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The comprehensive monograph on which this Digest is based, *School-College Collaborations: A Strategy for Helping Low-Income Minorities*, by Carol Ascher, is available for $8 from the ERIC Clearinghouse on Urban Education. In addition to providing an expanded discussion of the issues capsulized here, it includes descriptions of many collaboratives operating around the country and a 50-item reference list.

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